

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BEIRUT 00461 01 OF 02 270054Z
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R 260955Z JAN 78
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BEIRUT 0461

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PDEV LE
SUBJ: LEBANESE FRONT LEADERS MEET AT ZGHORTA

1. SUMMARY: SENIOR LEBANESE FRONT LEADERS MET IN ZGHORTA JANUARY 21 - 22. PUBLIC STATEMENTS AND PRESS REPORTING INDICATE THAT THEY REAFFIRMED SOME BASIC PRINCIPLES, INCLUDING THE DECISIONS OF THE JANUARY 1977 LEBANESE FRONT CONCLAVE SUPPORTING "PLURALITY;" BUT AT THE SAME TIME, IT APPEARS THAT THE FRONT'S SENIOR LEADERS CONCEPT OF CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM IS ESSENTIALLY TO AMEND MARGINALLY THE 1943 "NATIONAL PACT." MEETING ALSO DEALT WITH INTERNAL FRONT ORGANIZATIONAL PROBLEMS, APPARENTLY WITH THE PHALANGE AND NLP ABANDONING THEIR COLLECTION OF FUNDS IN THE NAME OF THE FRONT BUT NOT IN PRINCIPLE THEIR OWN PARTY WORK IN SULEIMAN FRANGIE'S "NORTHERN FRONT" TERRITORY. END SUMMARY.

2. LEBANESE FRONT "DIRECTORATE" LEADERS CAMILLE CHAMOUN, PIERRE GEMAYEL, SULIMAN FRANGIE, AND FATHER CHARBEL KASSIS, PLUS THEIR PRINCIPAL SUBORDINATES, INCLUDING CHARLES MALIK, JAWAD BOULOS, FOUAD EPHREM BOUSTANY, DORY CHAMOUN, AND
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PAGE 02 BEIRUT 00461 01 OF 02 270054Z

EDOUARD HONEIN MET IN FRANGIE'S HOME TOWN OF ZGHORTA JANUARY 21 AND 22.

3. THE FRONT LEADERS ADOPTED A "CHARTER" OF ELEVEN POINTS WHICH ARE MOSTLY UNEXCEPTIONABLE. ITEM (7) HOWEVER SAYS THE POLITICAL STRUCTURE OF THE NEW LEBANON SHOULD BE BASED ON "UNITY IN DIVERSITY."

THE MEETING ALSO ADOPTED SEVEN RESOLUTIONS, EXPANDING ON THE CHARTER. MOST IMPORTANT, RESOLUTION (5) SAYS THE FRONT MAINTAINS ITS PREVIOUS POSITION ON PALESTINIAN PRESENCE ON LEBANESE TERRITORY, CONSIDERING IT TO BE AN OBSTACLE TO ENTENTE WHICH MUST BE REMOVED: "IT IS NATURAL IN THIS SITUATION THAT LEBANESE AGREEMENT ON THIS POINT WILL HELP ENTENTE." THE "LEBANESE FRONT" IN ANY CASE "REMAINS OPEN TO ALL POSITIVE CONTACTS, FREE AND WORTHY, ARISING FROM ANY FRACTION, IN THE SERVICE OF THE OBJECTIVES WITHOUT WHICH LEBANON CANNOT EXIST."

4. RESOLUTION (4) HAS PROVOKED CONSIDERABLE CONTROVERSY: IT SAYS THE FRONT REAFFIRMS ITS ADHERENCE TO EARLIER RESOLUTIONS AND DECISIONS, INCLUDING THOSE OF THE SAYDET EL-BIR LEBANESE FRONT CONCLAVE (JANUARY 1977), PARTICULARLY THE "PRINCIPLE OF THE PLURALITY OF THE LEBANESE COLLECTIVITY, IN WHICH THE ORIGINAL CIVILIZATION SHOULD SERVE AS A BASIS FOR THE NEW POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS OF A UNIFIED LEBANON, TOWARDS WHICH ABSOLUTE ALLEGIANCE SHOULD BE PROCLAIMED TO AVOID CONFLICT AMONG LEBANESE; EVERY CULTURAL GROUP ("GROUPEMENT DE CIVILISATION") CAN THUS CONDUCT IN COMPLETE LIBERTY ITS OWN EDUCATIONAL, FINANCIAL, CULTURAL, SECURITY AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND EVERYTHING DEALING WITH CULTURAL AND SPIRITUAL RELATIONS WITH

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PAGE 03 BEIRUT 00461 01 OF 02 270054Z

THE WORLD OUTSIDE."

5. THE FRONT LEADERS ALSO ADOPTED A "STATUTE" FOR THE FRONT, LARGELY IN RESPONSE TO THE DEMANDS OF SULEIMAN FRANGIE, WHO IN RECENT MONTHS HAS BECOME INCREASINGLY RESENTFUL OF ACTIVITIES OF THE PHALANGE AND NLP IN HIS NORTHERN AREA, SUPPOSEDLY BUT NOT IN FACT IN THE NAME OF THE FRONT. HEREAFTER THE PHALANGE AND NLP MAY CONTINUE TO COLLECT MONEY IN THE NORTH, BUT IN THEIR OWN NAMES, NOT THE NAME OF THE FRONT. THE STATUTE SAYS THE FRONT CONSISTS ESSENTIALLY OF ITS FOUR FOUNDING LEADERS AND THAT ALL FRONT DECISIONS MUST BE TAKEN WITH THEIR UNANIMOUS AGREEMENT.

6. AFTER THE MEETING, PIERRE GEMAYEL SPOKE TO THE PRESS AND EXPRESSED SUPPORT FOR AN "ISLAMIC-CHRISTIAN SEMINAR WHICH COULD PAVE THE WAY TO A NEW ACCORD WHICH WOULD ELIMINATE DEFINITELY THE POSSIBILITY OF NEW FIGHTING," BUT OTHERS, PARTICULARLY CHAMOUN, DID NOT AGREE WITH GEMAYEL. WE SUSPECT THAT CHAMOUN WOULD PREFER TO WORK ON A CHAMOUN-SAEB SALAAM RAPPROACHEMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF WHATEVER THE

GOVERNMENT UNDERTAKES IN COMING MONTHS.

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PAGE 01 BEIRUT 00461 02 OF 02 270055Z
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BEIRUT 0461

7. REACTIONS. NON-LEBANESE FRONT CIRCLES HAVE
REACTED TO OUTCOME OF ZGHORTA MEETING WITH VARYING
DEGREES OF CRITICISM. SAEB SALAAM SAID SIMPLY HE DID
NOT LIKE REAFFIRMATION OF IDEA OF "PLURALISM."
CHAFIC WAZZAN SAID IT WAS A "SHOCK" TO THOSE SEEKING
TO REUNITE THE COUNTRY, AND SAID "THE PLURALISM
WHICH THE LEBANESE FRONT INSISTS ON MEANS, AS WE
UNDERSTAND IT, THE PERPETUATION OF POLITICAL
SECTARIANISM . . . IT EVEN MAKES REFERENCE TO THE
LEBANESE ARMY IN THAT CONTEXT." HE ARGUED THAT
THE PALESTINIAN PRESENCE SHOULD NOT BE REGARDED AS
AN OBSTACLE TO LEBANESE NATIONAL ACCORD "AS LONG
AS EVERYONE IS AGREED THAT THE PALESTINIANS MUST
RETURN TO THEIR USURPED HOMELAND AND MUST BE
SUPPORTED IN THEIR STRUGGLE TO SPEED THAT RETURN."
WALID JUMBLATT CALLED THE FRONT'S STATEMENT "A BLOW
TO LEBANESE UNITY." HE SAID, "WE NEED NO ONE TO
TEACH US ALLEGIANCE TO LEBANON . . . WE TOO WANT
LEBANON TO BE MASTER OF ITS OWN AFFAIRS . . . OUR
INSISTENCE ON THIS IS EXPRESSED BY OUR INSISTENCE ON
THE PRINCIPLE OF DEMOCRATIC RULE." ADDRESSING THE
QUESTION OF THE ORGANIZATION OF SECURITY IN THE
COUNTRY, JUBLATT SAID THE ARMY SHOULD BE "A FORCE
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PAGE 02 BEIRUT 00461 02 OF 02 270055Z

CAPABLE OF DOING ITS NATIONAL DUTY, WHICH CONSISTS OF DEFENDING OUR INTERNATIONAL BORDERS, AND NOTHING ELSE . . ."

8. CRITICAL REACTIONS FROM WEST BEIRUT HAVE THROWN THE FRONT ON THE DEFENSIVE: CAMILLE CHAMOUN, TALKING TO THE PRESS LATE JANUARY 23, PLEADED THAT THE STATEMENT HAS BEEN MISUNDERSTOOD, AND POINTED OUT THAT, DESPITE THE STATEMENT'S BLAMING THE PALESTINIAN PRESENCE AS AN OBSTACLE TO NATIONAL RECONCILIATION, IT ALSO SAID THE FRONT IS OPEN TO CONTACTS FROM ANY DIRECTION AIMED AT PROMOTING NATIONAL UNITY.

9. PERHAPS MOST CONSTRUCTIVE COMMENT COMES FROM ENGLISH-LANGUAGE IKE, WHICH IN EDITORIAL JANUARY 24 POINTS OUT THAT THOSE SEEKING PERFECT NATIONAL UNITY WOULD OF COURSE FIND MUCH TO CRITICIZE IN THE STATEMENT, BUT ARGUES THAT THEY OUGHT TO CONCENTRATE ON THE DONUT, NOT THE HOLE: THE ZGHORTA CONFERENCE HAS AT LEAST OPENED THE WAY FOR CHRISTIAN-MOSLEM DIALOGUE, AND REFLECTED THE NEED FOR A WORTHY SPOKESMAN FOR THE MOSLEM CAMP.

10. COMMENT: AS FAR AS THE PUBLIC RECORD GOES, THE ZGHORTA MEETING WAS FOR THE MOST PART A REAFFIRMATION OF THE FRONT'S WELL KNOWN PRINCIPALS. A SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE, HOWEVER, FROM RECENT ATTITUDES OF THE FRONT, IS THAT NATIONAL "AGREEMENT" IF NOT "ENTENTE" IS NOW REGARDED AS POSSIBLE PRIOR TO A SOLUTION TO THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM. CAMILLE CHAMOUN, PRESIDENT OF THE FRONT, IS THUS FREE TO PLAY THE GAME OF NATIONAL RECONCILIATION IN THE MONTHS TO COME AS HE SEES FIT AND WILL BE
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PAGE 03 BEIRUT 00461 02 OF 02 270055Z

ABLE TO COUNT ON THE GENERAL SUPPORT OF THE OTHER FRONT LEADERS. ALTHOUGH THE COMMUNIQUE FROM THE ZGHORTA MEETING DID NOT DIRECTLY ADDRESS THE ISSUE, IT IS WIDELY UNDERSTOOD THAT, WITH CHAMOUN IN THE LEADING ROLE, THE FRONT'S SENIOR LEADERSHIP IS PREPARED TO GO BACK TO THE 1943 NATIONAL PACT FORMULA, WITH SOME ADJUSTMENTS, SUCH AS THOSE EMBODIED IN THE 1976 "CONSTITUTIONAL DOCUMENT" AND SOME LIMITED FORM OF DECENTRALIZATION.

11. ALL-IN-ALL, IT LOOKS LIKE A SUCCESS FOR CAMILLE CHAMOUN: HE HAS ESTABLISHED HIMSELF AS THE UNQUESTIONED INTERLOCUTOR FOR LEBANON'S

CHRISTIANS IN THE FORTHCOMING NATIONAL DIALOGUE.

12. TEXTS BEING POUCHED TO DEPARTMENT.

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